1: Meek E, G-5 (1925-1930) 1931
FF38 Katab FF38

"Ei, ee." *Obwai*: "Na mi kiang a zangat se zangat (indecent). Refrain: "Ei, ee."

The indecency of the songs sung at the public festivals is in striking contrast to the rules of decorum which govern the ordinary private life. This is not characteristic of the Katab, but may be said to be general of all Negro society. To brothers-in-law, for example, any jokes about sexual intercourse would, in the ordinary course, be taboo and wholly impossible. A man will bow down in humble subjection to his parents-in-law and avoid them on all possible occasions. But on the occasion of public festivals all the ordinary rules of private life are waived, and there is a saturnalia which permits a father-in-law to dance round in the same circle as his daughter-in-law, singing songs referring in the main to sexual matters. It is repugnant to any native to repeat in cold blood the words of these songs to a European, and it would be equally repugnant to him to use them at any other time than on the occasion of the public festival when, as of old among the Romans, free expression is given to the pent-up feelings. (In this connection we may instance cases where during public festivals, e.g. among the Gwari, it is permissible to abuse the Chief without fear of retaliation for all actions during the year which were regarded as unjust and tyrannical.) An *obwai* festival is also held at harvest, and a month before the feast his voice is heard warning the people to make preparations and desist from idle disputes.

There are among the Katab no elaborate rites of initiation into the cult of *obwai*. Children are taken to his hut at an early age (4–8), warned to be obedient to their parents and given food. The short ceremony is concluded by a form of baptism in a stream, the smearing of the boys' heads with mahogany oil, and a feast in the village. It may be of interest to mention here the part that the *obwai* plays among the neighbouring Jaba tribe in the matter of initiation. These initiation rites among the Jaba have no connection with circumcision. They are performed when the lad is between 9 and 11 years of age. Among the Jaba, the *obwai* is known as the *Ku*[1] and the initiation rites are known as *woroku*. A noteworthy feature is that the lad is initiated not by his father, but by his maternal uncle. The father has no say in the matter. The lad goes to his maternal uncle's house, and the uncle provides the preliminary fee of one chicken. He

[1] This is a Jukun and apparently also an Ancient Egyptian term. See Meek, *A Sudanese Kingdom*, p. 263.

1: Meek E, G-5 (1925-1930) 1931
FF38 Katab FF38

794
881

escorts his nephew to the house of the *Ku* which he, with the other candidates for initiation, is required to enter blindfolded. They are all promptly beaten by the attendants of the representative of the *Ku*. (The maternal uncle may take some of the lashes himself to save his nephew.) The bandages are removed, and the priest addresses the boys, saying: "Do you see who I am?" They say "Yes". "Well," says the priest, "you know that the women and children believe that our dead fathers reside here. Do you see any signs of them?" The lads say "No". The priest thereupon warns them that if they ever disclose the make-believe character of the rites they will meet with instant death. They are further warned that if they steal, or despise their parents, they will certainly be punished. (Fathers report unruly sons to the *Ku*, and they are severely handled at the first ensuing festival which all must attend.) But above all they must never disclose to a woman the secret of the *Ku*. The boys are kept there for five days, and if they behave with decorum receive no further thrashings. But if a boy succeeded in making his escape to his village, he would be speedily captured, and he and all the other boys, it is said, would be put to death as a proof that the *Ku* had swallowed them! Enormous quantities of food have to be consumed by the boys during these days. The food is provided by the women, and the boys must eat it, for the *Ku* is supposed to have an insatiable appetite. At the end of five days they are taken out to the bush during the night and bathed in white mud and shaved in patchy fashion to give them the appearance of having been vomited up by the *Ku*. They then return to the village and are welcomed by their mothers and anointed with oil to clean off the white mud. They beat all girls with whom they used to play, for they have now become manly and children of the *Ku*. They are then required to engage in hunting animals in the bush and to spend a further five nights in the hut of the *Ku*. All animals killed become the perquisite of the priest and his followers. On the conclusion of this period they return finally to the village, but from that day onwards associate only with themselves and their senior male relatives. Hitherto they were women. Now they have become men. Their women relatives treat them with especial favour, provide them abundantly with food, but the lads address no word to their mothers, aunts, or sisters. All conversation with women

1: Meek E, G-5 (1925-1930) 1931
FF38 Katab FF38

is strictly taboo. This taboo is kept up for three months, and to mark its conclusion all the lads must go to the farm of the priest and do one day's work. The priest then gives permission to the lads to speak to women, reminding them of the consequence of revealing the common secret. The women prepare a feast and pray the boys that they may once again hear them speak. It is clear that these rites symbolize a process of death and rebirth. The three months' silence is a portrayal of the early years of children who have not yet learned to speak. They are a precaution also against the revelation of the mysteries to women. Anyone subsequently blurting out the truth was taken to the *Ku* house and tried. If he was proved guilty, his father took ashes and rubbed them on the boy's head (the symbol of mourning). The boy was then impaled on a sharpened stake, all the initiates outside dancing and singing to drown the screams of the victim. The women were told that the *Ku* had swallowed the boy.

These inhuman practices cannot, of course, be carried out nowadays. The imposition of fines in lieu of capital punishment is apparently insufficient to maintain the secrecy of the rites; otherwise the above details would not have been obtained.

We have seen that the *obwai* rites are of considerable social importance, and to the uninitiated involve also the religious belief that the dead are in close association with the living. But these religious beliefs are shattered at initiation, for the boys learn for the first time that the dead do not assemble in the *obwai* house, and that the mysterious voice of the *obwai* is produced by a purely mechanical process. In spite of this, the initiates do not apparently regard the whole thing as a fraud; for a part only of the mysteries is revealed and the initiates still continue to believe that the *Agwam obwai* is in some vague way a go-between between the living and the dead. It is right, therefore, that the punishment of social offences, whether committed by the initiated or uninitiated, should be in the hands of the *Agwam obwai*.

Rain-making.—It would appear that the rain-making rites also are intimately associated with the ancestors. Each kindred has its rain-maker, and though he may perform the rites on some sacred stone or other material object and address his prayers to the Lord of Heaven (Gwaza), at the back of his mind

2: Gunn E-4 (no date) 1956 FF38 Katab FF38
Jaba

SOCIAL STRUCTURE: LOCAL ORGANS OF AUTHORITY

631 At the time of the transfer of Jaba District from Jema'a Division to Zaria Province, in 1934, it was stated that the District comprised "27 villages[135] whose heads are directly responsible to the Pop Ham [chief of Jaba]," a situation comparable to that seen in Moroa; a current list of Village-areas was not accessible in Zaria, but various reports suggest the possibility that a smaller number has emerged in recent years as a result of reorganization.

621 According to Meek, the village constitutes the group within which a man may not seek a secondary wife. He indicates that there are further administrative and social sub-divisions, "wards" (=hamlets? cf. Kagoro, farther above), these being 582 exogamous as well as local groupings; but Cole stresses the fact that "kindreds" (that is, kinship groupings of the largest scale) are dispersed among two or more villages (perhaps sometimes not even contiguous), as a general rule.

621 A report made in 1933 by Barnicot states that in Kachia District Jaba are divided into five "clans" and "six Village-areas." In 1949 Cole gives five Village-areas, each equated with a "kindred." What order of kinship grouping the hamlet constitutes in Kachia is not known.

In Kagarko District, Jaba are found in three Village-areas dominated by other tribal groups; in Yeskwa they are settled with Yeskwa in two Village-areas. In Kagoma-Yeskwa District of Jema'a Emirate (Plateau Province), Kano, Kirti, and Kusan are currently identified by Administration as Jaba; they are separated from Jaba District of Zaria by Kagoma tribal settlement, and it is noteworthy that until 1934, at least, and possibly even more recently, these same villages were labelled Kagoma by all investigators.

692 A Jaba tribal court was organized in Jaba District in 1935, and appears to have been designed to serve the entire Jaba community of Zaria Province, both in and out of the Emirate; but data from Kachia District indicate that Jaba there may have recourse to the local Native Court (Kadara-Kuturmi), on which elders representing all clans of Kachia Jaba sit. On the other hand, decisions taken in Jema'a Emirate with respect to Jaba there are known to have been reversed in conformity with advice given by Pop Ham.

LIFE CYCLE

Birth

775 According to Temple, "the Jaba believe that the souls of the dead can enter the womb of a living woman and be reborn" (but see also *Religious Beliefs*, below).
844 At birth the mother and child are bathed in cold water. On the fourth day the child is taken from its mother's hut and named (by the father if a boy, the mother if a 553 girl) in the presence of the women of the compound. Twins, however, are not named till the seventh day, when elders of the village—and so, presumably, of the large-scale kinship unit—meet to perform the ceremony and partake of a feast provided by the father.

584 Temple states that a girl is betrothed at birth, claimed by right by the first eligible man to see her (cf. Katab and Kaje).

Initiation

[304] It is not stated whether circumcision is in fact a practice of Jaba: Meek states only that "initiation rites . . . have no connection with circumcision." Initiation 881 of boys takes place between their ninth and eleventh years. A boy's maternal uncle acts as his sponsor, providing "the preliminary fee of one chicken": Meek fails to indicate, however, whether initiation in effect unites the tribe, at Kwoi, perhaps, or

[135] A total of 27 villages in the District is listed in the Village Directory of the 1931 Census; three of these are recognized by Administration as Lungu. The largest are: Chori (2,219), Kwai (Kwoi) (3,700), Nok (1,980), Samban Gida (1,045).

2: Gunn E-4 (no date) 1956 FF38 Katab FF38
Jaba

whether rites are performed at each village more or less independently, and if the latter, whether a boy is initiated in his own or his mother's village. 881

At initiation the boys are secluded for five days " in the house of Ku "; the *ku* appears to be very much the equivalent of the Katab *obwai*, in Meek's view,[124] but that term does not seem to be used by Jaba. The boys are beaten and the essential secrets of the cult revealed to them. At the end of their confinement they are taken secretly into the bush and " bathed in white mud . . . to give them the appearance of having been vomited up by the Ku." They then return to the village and are anointed with oil by their mothers, and beat all girls with whom they used to play, " for they have now become manly and children of the Ku." Further rites follow, including hunts in the bush, and five additional nights are spent in the *ku* house. When they finally return home they may not speak with women relatives for a period of three months, to mark the end of which the boys perform a day of farm labour for the priest and " the women prepare a feast and pray the boys that they may once again hear them speak."

According to Meek, there is among Jaba " a female society," the precise character of which is not made plain (but see also *Religious Beliefs*, below). Initiation, however, is said to enable a woman to take an animal shape. Whether the *ku* initiation of boys has the same effect is not stated.

Marriage

Betrothal is fixed by a gift to the girl's father of " a ring, a fowl, or 2,000 cowries," according to Temple. Until a girl reaches marriageable age (nine or ten years), her mother receives annually from the suitor a bag of acha or guinea-corn. At that time, then, the suitor presents her father with a " large " hoe (presumably the great spurred hoe of this region), and six goats; he dispenses a quantity of *tuo* (Hausa, guinea-corn porridge) among her relatives; and finally sends the bride cosmetic oil. The bride is then brought by girls of her village (hence her kin-group) to her husband's compound, where he awaits her in the company of male friends. The bride, groom and their attendants then partake of a feast of *tuo*, the sexes segregated. According to Temple, payments of the equivalent of two shillings annually are made to the wife's parents by the husband or his heirs as long as the wife lives, but only so long as, and while, she remains in his compound: secondary marriage (with the connivance of the wife's parents) obtains among Jaba as among Katab and others of this region: as indicated already, apart from observing the ordinary rules of exogamy, a man must seek secondary wives in neighbouring villages—including those of neighbouring " tribes." 583 587

Burial

Meek describes a decanter-type grave for Jaba, but Temple, a shaft-and-tunnel. A chief is buried under the " porch " of his house. When a chief dies (whether " tribal " chief, or head of village or hamlet—and kinship unit—is not stated), the body is prepared by a gathering of elders; the body of a commoner is prepared for burial by women relatives. According to Temple, the heirs and relatives provide beer and meat for a feast, cooked by the women outside the " Magajin dodo's house " (the " Ku house " referred to by Meek?). A voice from within, interpreted as that of the spirit of the deceased, salutes his friends and thanks them for their gifts. The women thereupon fly to their houses, while the men remain to devour the meat. 764

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

Meek states that " Jaba appear to have been worshippers of the sun," no doubt basing his speculation on the fact that *sun* and *god* are homophones in Jaba language (Meek does not mark tone in his vocabulary). 771

[124] However, Meek does not indicate explicitly any connection with the ancestor cult. See *Religious Beliefs*, below.